Mario's Game Gallery
Rating: Very Good

****

MacPlay
17922 Fitch Avenue
Irvine, CA 92714

714/553-3530

Suggested Retail Price: $39.95

System requirements:
Windows: IBM/Tandy and 100% compatibles; 386/33Mhz or faster; DOS 5.0 or higher; hard drive required (7MB); 2MB RAM (580K base + 1MB EMS) for DOS; 4MB RAM for Windows; VGA monitor.

Macintosh: 256-color Macintosh computer (68030 or higher), 2 MB of RAM, 7 MB free hard disk space for installation, Double speed CD-ROM drive, System software 7.0 or later.

****

What is it about this little Italian plumber? From the unlikely hero of Donkey Kong in the '80s to slews of spin-off games, movie stardom, and a recent leap to the home computer, Mario is truly video gaming's most enduring character. Now, from MacPlay and Presage, comes the latest entry in the Mario dynasty: Mario's Game Gallery.

Game Gallery transports five classic games into the 'world of Mario': Checkers, Dominoes, Go Fish, Backgammon, and Yacht (similar to Yahtzee) are all given a face-lift with characters familiar to Mario fans. Yoshis, Koopas, Bowzers, and Piranha Plants all make an appearance somewhere in the Gallery, but the main attraction is, of course, Mario himself. As your computerized opponent, Mario has something he lacks in his home video games: a voice, complete with Italian accent. He reacts to your moves, offering editorial quips and exclamations, and even tells a couple of jokes. And no matter how luck treats you, Mario is quite the diplomat, praising players with phrases like "Oh you-a so good!" and "I'm-a really enjoy playing with you!" Thankfully, his broken English grammar is translated correctly at the bottom of the screen.

The games themselves are done very well. Each is easy to learn (Backgammon being the most difficult for youngsters to grasp) and fun to watch. There's plenty of cute animations and familiar "Marioland" music. Backgammon and Checkers feature some humorous character animations during play, similar to a G-Rated "Battle Chess." MacPlay has wisely chosen four games that depend on an equal amount of skill and luck. This gives younger or less confident players a fair chance at winning the games. Checkers is the exception to that rule, and Mario doesn't cut you any slack. There's no skill setting to "dumb down" Mario, and I got double-jumped more than a junk car at a monster truck show. Maybe I'm just lousy at Checkers. Other game play options are limited, but include 'Forced Jumps' and 'Animated Pieces'.

There's also an on-line help feature that reminds you of basic rules for each game, but it always refers you to the printed manual for complete instructions. Hmmm...the rules are detailed just a bit more in the manual, so why have both? I'm-a so confuse'.

On the technical side, although I tested Game Gallery on CD-ROM, you must install the game on your hard drive. You are given two options, a 'Big Install' (around nine megabytes) or a 'Standard Install' (around seven). The Big Install

option just loads higher sampling rate versions of the speech and sound effects. The sound quality difference was negligible, and installing the smaller version made speech and game play noticeably smoother. Also included on the CD are preview demos of other MacPlay offerings including Flashback, Alone In The Dark, and Power Pete. I found that an enjoyable bonus.

Mario's Game Gallery is fun and well-executed overall. Priced a little less than a Nintendo cartridge, it's also a pretty good value. It's aimed at six to sixteen-year-olds, but as the median age of computer users keeps getting younger, it could appeal to a slightly wider age spread.

Reviewed by Steve Broderson for NautilusCD September, 1995.